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United States Department of Agriculture  
Bureau of Biological Survey  
Washington, D. C.

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GENERAL MEMORANDUMMILEAGE ALLOWANCE FOR USE OF PERSONALLY-OWNED AUTOMOBILES  
IN OFFICIAL TRAVEL

The extent to which personally owned automobiles are now being used in the performance of official travel has made necessary a careful study into this means of transportation, especially in view of data now available on the actual cost of operating various makes of passenger-carrying and light truck type cars which show that in almost every case they are operated at costs considerably less than the present seven-cent mileage rate. Many of the government passenger and light truck type cars are being operated at a cost considerably less than five cents per mile (including depreciation) and in a good many cases at about half the present mileage rate of seven cents. These facts have led to the establishing of lower mileage rates in other bureaus of this department, and the Director of the Office of Personnel and Business Administration of the department has called upon all bureaus to consider the feasibility of establishing five cents per mile as the general maximum rate to apply to official travel performed in personally owned automobiles. Under these circumstances, the bureau is unable to justify, at the present time, a general maximum mileage rate of seven cents for use of personally owned cars.

Much thought has been given to the determining of a just rate. Although the cost of operating automobiles varies considerably in different sections of the country and under different road conditions, it seems impracticable to establish different rates for different sections, as even in the same general section operating costs may vary considerably with different activities of the employees travelling. The establishing of a rate which can be applied with fairness as the standard throughout the field seems to be the only practical method to follow, with some latitude, however, for taking care of exceptional cases, such as where mountain travel, unimproved road conditions, high local cost of gasoline, and the like make operating costs necessarily higher than those generally prevailing in this country.

Effective February 1, 1932, the use of personally owned automobiles on official travel will therefore be governed by the following practices:

1. When authorized to perform travel by personally owned automobile on a mileage basis the rate of mileage will be five cents per mile for distances actually travelled on official business, unless a higher rate of mileage has been specifically authorized (see "2" below); provided that in any instance where an entire trip involves travel between points accessible by railroad or other common carrier and where travel by personally owned

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automobile is of advantage to the Government, chiefly in respect to expediting performance of duty, mileage rate of not to exceed three and one half cents per mile will be allowed, but in no case will a rate that will result in the payment of total mileage greater than the actual expenses of the same travel by common carrier be allowed. Use of personally owned automobile in official travel for reasons of personal preference only will be paid for on the actual expense basis - that is, reimbursement will be made for gasoline and oil actually used in official travel - and any time required in making the trip over what would have been consumed in traveling by rail will be covered by leave.

2. When operating costs are unusually high owing to travel in mountainous country or over unimproved roads throughout the general area traversed, or to other local conditions, such as exceptionally high cost for motor supplies, appeals will be considered for allowing in individual cases a mileage rate higher than five cents, but not to exceed seven cents, per mile.

In determining in special cases whether or not a mileage allowance in excess of five cents a mile is justified, the bureau will give consideration not to the cost of operating a car of the particular make and grade used by employees, but to the cost of operating an automobile of the type which would be adequate to the needs of official travel in the area traversed. Authentic information, however, must be furnished by the employee appealing for a higher mileage allowance on the operating cost on his own automobile, stating the make of car, original cost, and the items of expense included in his calculations to arrive at the actual cost of operation and showing the rate of depreciation, other carrying charges, and the percentage on official business of the total mileage on which operating costs are based. Costs of operation of other cars of the types that are considered adequate for the official travel performed and that are used in the same general area should also be furnished, if reliable records are available, in further substantiation of the operating costs for travel by automobile in the particular area. The character of the country traversed should also be set forth in detail, showing among other things the percentage of travel over what would be classed as improved roads and the percentage of travel over unimproved roads. If an appeal is made on account of a higher cost of motor supplies than is generally paid in other localities, the average cost of gasoline, oils and greases, tires, repairs, and other supplies should be stated. In other words, if a higher mileage allowance than five cents per mile is to be granted, such information on operating costs must be furnished that will make possible an intelligent consideration of the question and a determination from the evidence submitted.

Should an employee who is in doubt as to what it is costing him to operate his automobile feel that five cents per mile is too low, it is suggested that he keep accounts of the actual operating costs over a given period. If his costs, including a reasonable amount for depreciation and other carrying charges, then appear to justify an increased mileage allowance, he may then submit the matter with full details to the bureau for consideration.



It is the desire of the bureau to compensate its employees fairly for reasonable and actual cost for operating their own cars, or cars adequate to perform the work of the department, when it is necessary for them to use such means of transportation in the carrying out of their official orders. Under present restrictions on mileage allowances, however, it is necessary to have actual facts upon which to base an increase in the general maximum rate of five cents per mile.

There will be no change in the bureau policy of furnishing government-owned automobiles, as fast as this can be done, to replace personally owned ones used in official business where travel is sufficiently extensive to make it of advantage to do so, as government-owned automobiles can unquestionably be operated at less expense to the government than the personally owned automobiles.

Personally owned automobiles will be used on the mileage basis for official travel only when other means of transportation, Government or public, are not available, or when travel by personally owned automobile is more economical and/or advantageous to the Government than is travel by common carrier. The bureau realizes that in many cases the personally-owned automobile in the absence of a Government-owned car is the only satisfactory and expeditious means of accomplishing travel in certain areas, and it is not the intention to discourage its use under such circumstances. The employee claiming mileage for use of his automobile so used must make satisfactory showing in accordance with paragraph 12 (a) of the Standardized Government Travel Regulations as approved by the President, April 21, 1931, of the advantage to the Government resulting from such use of automobile. Trips should be so planned and routes so worked out that all unnecessary travel is avoided and mileage kept to the minimum for accomplishing the required work.

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Chief.

